Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons: Third Preparatory Committee Session of the 2020 Review Cycle

Side event: “Moving forward with the FMCT Preparatory Group report recommendations in advance of 2020 NPT Review Conference”

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Ambassador Hulan,
Ambassador Gabrielse,
Distinguished Panelists,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to begin by thanking Australia, Canada, Germany and the Netherlands for organising this side event to stimulate discussion on the FMCT within the NPT framework.

The negotiation of a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices remains one of the oldest outstanding priorities on the nuclear disarmament agenda.

Beginning with GA resolution 1148 in 1957, Member States have called for the cessation of the production of fissionable material for weapons purposes.

Since 1993, the General Assembly has recommended “the negotiation in the most appropriate international forum of a non-discriminatory, multilateral and internationally and effectively verifiable treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices”.

However, with the continued failure of the Conference on Disarmament to reach agreement on this issue, it has fallen to various Groups of Governmental Experts, or GGEs, to carry it forward.

In 2015 and 2017, experts made great strides, including by identifying potential elements for a treaty. As a result, the international disarmament community is well-versed in the substantive issues related to this topic and the technical feasibility of a treaty. Unfortunately, the community remains divided as to the modalities for how to pursue it.

In the context of the NPT, negotiation of a treaty related to fissile material for nuclear weapons is clearly an effective measure under Article VI. In the context of the Treaty, significant and laudable progress has actually been made toward the goals of such a treaty.
All but one of the nuclear-weapon States have maintained moratoria on the production of fissile material for weapons and they have dismantled or converted to peaceful use the facilities where such material was produced.

However, moratoria are not a substitute for a verifiable, legally-binding prohibition. Moreover, those states possessing nuclear weapons outside the NPT have yet to announce such moratoria and seem indisposed to do so in the immediate future.

Today’s tense security climate has precipitated an increased emphasis on the role and value of nuclear weapons, including plans to deploy new types of inherently destabilizing weapons. Restraints on nuclear arsenals are weakening and, in some cases, have collapsed. In such a context, the need for a prohibition becomes even more critical.

In his disarmament agenda, the Secretary-General headed the call coming from the international community and invited all States to work together to achieve concrete and irreversible steps to prepare for a world free of nuclear weapons, including by ending the production of fissile material for use in weapons.

He has stressed that a multilateral, non-discriminatory and verifiable treaty accomplishes both non-proliferation and disarmament objectives, and can be regarded as an irreversible step towards the elimination of nuclear weapons.

Indeed, a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and other explosive devices is a requirement for achieving and maintaining a world free of nuclear weapons.

To help achieve this goal, and thanks to the generous support of Canada, the Office for Disarmament has been facilitating regional dialogue and raising awareness on the issue. In March 2018, three regional workshops for African, Asian and Pacific, Latin American and Caribbean Member States were undertaken in cooperation with UNODA’s regional centers. The workshops provided knowledge and information on issues relevant to banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.
We are also currently supporting a multiyear project financed entirely by the European Union, which comprises a series of regional and sub-regional workshops with the participation of regional organizations and a publication on the topic.

Decades of work at the multilateral level, the “aquis” of the GGE and of the high-level expert preparatory Group and the substantive discussions that took place last year within the Conference on Disarmament have ensured the necessary technical and substantive basis to move forward in the existing disarmament machinery. What is lacking is political consensus.

All efforts should be exerted to rectify this situation and bring about negotiation of this long overdue critical step in disarmament.

Thank you.